

14 September 1945

R & A 3251

U.S. Dept. of State, Office of Intelligence Research.

JAPANESE ANALYSES OF THE CAUSES OF DEFEAT

DECLASSIFIED
SEE EXCHANGE & GIFT DIV.
DECLASSIFICATION FILE NO. 247

Since Japan's surrender, the Japanese press and some public officials have attempted to state the reasons for her defeat, both for domestic and for foreign consumption. Of the twenty analyses which are known to have been made between 20 August and 5 September, three were apparently designed solely for American consumption and one appeared in the English-language Nippon Times. The remainder consisted of speeches or editorials directed to a Japanese audience and were in most cases broadcast in English translation to American listeners. Because of the obscurity of much of the language used and the possibility of "slanted" versions, this material cannot be considered a very reliable indication of Japanese opinion, but nevertheless permits some interesting observations.

The reasons cited for defeat fall into three somewhat overlapping categories: the superior power of the Allied war effort, the behavior of the Japanese people as a whole, and the behavior of specific groups of Japanese.

Superior Power of the Allied War Effort

The most direct and obvious reason for defeat, that of deteriorating fighting strength in the face of superior Allied power, was specifically cited only four times, once by Lt. Gen. ISHIBARA Kanji in a speech at Utsunomiya¹ and three times in statements by Premier HIGASHI-KUNI Naruhiko.² In other analyses, this reason was tacitly assumed and the investigation directed at the more fundamental problem of why Japanese fighting strength had proved inferior.

Several sources ascribed defeat specifically to the low level of Japanese scientific achievement as compared with that of the Allies. An editorial in the Nippon Times emphasized the need for application of scientific methods in the future, and stated:

- 1 FCC DR 4 September 1945, BD-5, 6 in English to American Zone
2 FCC DR 28 August 1945, BC-1 English to American Zone, 29 August 1945, F-5 Romaji to GEA; 5 September 1945, BA-3 Romaji to GEA

CLASSIFICATION

English to West
English to West

English to America
1 English to America

Copy No. 18

Collected and

4B250
4/30
mad36/16/49

"...the fact that so many of our wartime measures degenerated into mere matters of form and that defects cropped up in the concrete application of our plans to actual conditions, necessitating change upon change until finally a breakdown resulted, showed clearly the lack of scientific consideration and mathematical foundation in our national education..."³

Behavior of the Japanese People as a Whole

Eleven of the twenty analyses can be interpreted as placing the responsibility for defeat on the people as a whole, either because of imperfections in their moral character or because of their general inadequacy in the face of wartime demands. Specific elements of the population were sometimes named, but with the statement that these and all the rest of the people were equally culpable.

Three of the eleven criticisms were made by Premier Higashi-Kuni⁴ who emphasized that the mistakes of the whole nation were responsible. Lt. Gen. Ishihara⁵ cited general moral deterioration, and TAKASAKA Masaki of Kyoto Imperial University, writing in the Mainichi Shimbun, ascribed the defeat to Japanese subjectivity and inferior social morality, together with inferior material culture.⁶ Both the Asahi and the Yomiuri-Hochi published similar analyses.⁷ MORIKO Masayoshi, broadcasting to Western North America, dwelt on the general provincialism and retarded industrial organization of the people,⁸ while TOYAMA Hideozo on the Japanese Home Service asserted that the reason for defeat lay within each individual rather than in government regulation of individual effort and described the people's attitude in these terms: "The majority of the people took it for granted that the Nation was destined to lose the war. It was the people's selection. It was their tendency. It was their servility."⁹

Only one statement in the Japanese press specifically stated that the people's responsibility lay in their lack of political participation, their blind following of government leadership.¹⁰ This statement was contained in an editorial in the Asahi of 20 August; subsequently, the Asahi blamed the party politicians for the political backwardness of the Japanese people.¹¹ A statement by "a prominent woman leader of the central headquarters of the Industrial Service Association" cited a similar cause of defeat:

- 3 FCC DR 25 August 1945, BD-1, English to American Zone
4 Identical with #2
5 Identical with #1
6 FCC DR 22 August 1945, BE-3 English to Western North America
7 FCC DR 25 August 1945, F-1 English to Western North America;
FCC DR 28 August 1945, F-7 English to Western North America
8 FCC DR 23 August 1945, F-1
9 FCC DR 28 August 1945, F-4,5
10 FCC DR 20 August 1945, BC-5 English to American Zone
11 FCC DR 21 August 1945, BE-1 English to American Zone
- 720,325

"...Among these causes to be considered, one thing Japanese women should reflect [sic] in their [little] concern with political affairs from the standpoint of women. Even in the case when problems which have close connection with the women's life were submitted and practiced [sic] by the Government, they did not take them up as their own problems, but simply accepted as being forced on them and they did not show any zeal to positively grapple with them.... "12

One other Asahi editorial may perhaps be interpreted as applying to the whole people, although it was probably aimed at the nation's leaders:

"...Another thing to be realized thoroughly is the fundamental error of Japan's international conduct which was based upon excessive faith in military force and therefore was characterized by extreme exclusionism and dogmatism. Such not only was a glaring contradiction, not only a human evolution but to the progress of international politics. [sic] That extreme faith in military force also was responsible for a general ignorance and low level of political intelligence in the people... "13

Behavior of Specific Groups of Japanese

The conduct of Government officials, the quality of political leadership, and wartime controls were also blamed for the defeat. Most of these criticisms were complaints of the kind which normally find expression in Japan when some political error provides the opportunity and contained no indication of any fundamental change in attitudes. An unidentified government official was quoted in the Asahi as complaining of the weak-minded policies of government officials in general, who compromised in the face of opposition rather than insisting on needed measures; he was also quoted as deploring the lack of able local officials at the town level and the inadequate training of potential government officials.¹⁴ The Asahi censured the sectionalism and petty greediness of government officials.¹⁵ Lt. Gen. Ishihara, in his speech at Utsunomiya¹⁶, listed as two of the basic causes of defeat: "lack of good faith on the part of Government officials who indulged in shameless act", including

-
- 12 FCC DR 27 August 1945, BB-15 English to Western North America. The whole statement appears to have been designed for publication in Japan, but it is not clear if it was released for Japanese consumption.
- 13 FCC DR 28 August 1945, BB-4 English to Western North America.
- 14 FCC DR 22 August 1945, BB-1, Romaji to GEA
- 15 FCC DR 25 August 1945, F-1, English to Western America
- 16 FCC DR 4 September 1945, BD-5, 6 in English to American Zone

graft cases," and "incompetence of the Elder Statesmen who indulged in 'useless talks' and failed in taking timely action."

TOGO Minoru, interpellating in the Diet, criticized the multiple courses pursued by the nation's governmental policies and stated that the "failure to pursue a clearly defined single policy was the main contributing factor to our defeat."¹⁷ AIKAWA Yoshisuke, former president of the Manchurian Heavy Industries Corporation, in an interview appearing in the Mainichi, cited the lack of responsibility on the part of government officials and political circles as one of the chief reasons for defeat, ascribing this irresponsibility both to the nature of the civil service promotion system and to the tendency of higher officials to effect compromises when differences arose. He also cited the conflicts between the War and Navy Ministries in their demands upon industrial production and implied that conflicts also existed in the war operations proper. ¹⁸

Premier Higashi-Kuni in his first press interview found fault with governmental policies as follows:

"...too many regulations and laws were established recklessly, and in some fields controls which were not adaptable to our Nation were placed. As a result the people were completely tied down and were unable to do anything. This I believe is also a reason for the defeat..."¹⁹

On the previous day, Lt. Gen. Ishihara, writing in the Yomiuri-Hochi, had strongly censured the government policy of strict controls over political activity, stating further that:

"...this self-interest policy or bureaucracy as a whole has stifled freedom of speech and associations to result in the creation of a spiritless Japanese people. This evil also has been responsible for the organization of hostile military, government, educational, and financial cliques..."²⁰

Togo Minoru gave the following unfavorable description of the political leadership:

-
- 17 FCC DR 6 September 1945, BA-20, Domei Press Service in Kana
18 FCC DR 4 September 1945, BD-4, English to American Zone
19 FCC DR 29 August 1945, F-5, Romaji to GEA
20 FCC DR 29 August 1945, F-2, English to the American Zone

"To speak frankly, the greatest contributing factor to defeat was that government became the monopoly of the military and the bureaucrats, and that those who would not assume responsibility for ... words missing took control of political affairs, which resulted in obscuring the sources of responsibility..."²¹

This statement by Togo Minoru contains one of the few specific criticisms of the military or of militarism generally. The most outspoken statement of this nature came from Lt. Gen. Ishihara, in his frank speech at Utsunomiya:

"...Army and Navy officers, failing to live up to the Imperial instructions given by the late Emperor Meiji laying down the cardinal principles to be observed by the armed services, participated in political activities, thereby neglecting their own duties in the fighting services..."²²

The only general criticism of militarism as a policy, however, was contained in two Asahi editorials published on the same day. In one case, it was said that excessive faith in military force was the fundamental error in Japan's international conduct²³ and in the other:

"It is because we relied solely on force and acted on crude chauvinism that we must now taste miserable defeat. Not only did such an attitude run counter to the general world situation, but it also kept the Japanese people in ignorance and political obscurity and backwardness. We must first give up the idea that might is right and subscribe to new internationalism based on mutual and peaceful cooperation among free nations..."²⁴

No Specific Scapegoats

It is worth noting that all of the analyses are couched in quite general terms. There is no attempt to fix responsibility for defeat on individual leaders or other than fairly large and complex groups²⁵. Moreover, the analyses by-pass the question of why Japanese intelligence failed to report Allied material superiority or, if they did, of why war was initiated. There is no mention of specific events, such as the failure thoroughly to exploit the success at Pearl Harbor, nor any attempt to determine responsibility for such events. Rather, the tendency, from the Premier down, is to generalize the responsibility, cross the war off as a bad job, and direct public attention to the

- 21 FCC DR 6 September 1945, BA-21, Domei Press Service in Kana)
- 22 FCC DR 4 September 1945, BD-5, 6 in English to American Zone
- 23 FCC DR 28 August 1945, BB-4, English to Western North America.
- 24 FCC DR 28 August 1945, BA-3, English to American Zone
- 25 Premier Higashi-Kuni took the converse action by protecting the Emperor from possible criticism, by stating that his motivation prior to war had been the desire to preserve peace and, throughout the war, the desire to restore it as soon as possible. FCC DR 5 September 1945, BA-5

the future. Further, only the two Asahi editorials cited above²⁶ and possibly the statement of Lt. Gen. Iahihara²⁷ contain any clear criticism of the premises on which Japanese foreign policy was based. Instead of deploring initiation of the war, most sources regret its loss, without discarding either the ideal of Asiatic independence or the belief in the necessity of conflict with Western imperialism.

26 FCC DR 28 August 1945, BB-4, English to Western North America

27 FCC DR 4 September 1945, BB-5, 6 in English to American Zone